

Listing of Claims:

1-42. (Canceled)

43. (New) A feeder assembly comprising:

a lifting mechanism adapted to selectively lift an item from a stack of items, wherein the lifting mechanism reciprocates in a first direction between an engagement position wherein the lifting mechanism engages the item, and a lifted position wherein the lifting mechanism completely separates the item from the stack of items; and

a gripping mechanism adapted to selectively remove the item from the lifting mechanism and move the item to a desired location, wherein the gripping mechanism reciprocates, in a second direction generally perpendicular to the first direction, between an item grasping location wherein the jaw closes around the item and removes the item from the lifting mechanism, an item release location wherein the jaw is open and releases the item to the desired location, and a home location.

44. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 43, further comprising a plurality of sensors for controlling the lifting mechanism and the gripping mechanism.

45. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 43, wherein the lifting mechanism comprises at least one suction cup.

46. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 45, wherein the lifting mechanism further includes a separator element to assist in separating the item from the stack as the item is lifted from the stack.

47. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 43, wherein the gripping mechanism comprises a jaw, the jaw being selectively moveable between an open and closed position.

48. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 43, further comprising:
at least one platform adapted to support the stack of items and advance the stack of items to a desired position proximate the lifting mechanism; and
a drive assembly for driving the at least one platform.

49. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 48, further comprising a sensor for determining when the stack of items has reached the desired position.

50. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 48, wherein the at least one platform is selectively re-positionable along a path of the drive assembly.

51. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 50, wherein the at least one platform is slidably mounted to a guide member.

52. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 50, wherein the at least one platform includes an engagement element for selectively coupling the at least one platform to the drive assembly.

53. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 52, wherein the drive assembly includes a drive belt having a plurality of notches, and wherein the engagement element is selectively engaged in at least one of the plurality of notches in the drive belt.

54. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 48, wherein the at least one platform includes a first platform and a second platform cooperating to sequentially move a plurality of stacks of items to the desired position.

55. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 54, wherein the first platform supports a first stack of items and the second platform supports a second stack of items, and wherein the first platform is removable from the first stack of items such that the first stack of items and the second stack of items become a combined stack of items, and the first platform is repositionable relative to the second platform to receive a subsequent stack of items.

56. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 46, wherein the separator element is positionable between a first position and a second position to impart varying degrees of distortion to the item being lifted by the lifting mechanism.

57. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 44, wherein one of the plurality of sensors is a lifting mechanism extended sensor for sensing when the lifting mechanism is in the engagement position.

58. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 44, wherein one of the plurality of sensors is a lifting mechanism retracted sensor for sensing when the lifting mechanism is in the lifted position.

59. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 44, wherein one of the plurality of sensors is a gripping mechanism extended sensor for sensing when the gripping mechanism is in the item grasping location and for signaling to the gripping mechanism to grasp the item from the lifting mechanism.

60. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 44, wherein one of the plurality of sensors is a gripping mechanism release sensor for sensing when the gripping mechanism is proximate the item release location and for signaling to the gripper mechanism to release the item.

61. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 44, wherein one of the plurality of sensors is a gripping mechanism retracted sensor for sensing when the gripping mechanism is in the home location and for signaling to the feeder assembly that the gripping mechanism is ready to start a new feed cycle.

62. (New) The feeder assembly of Claim 47, wherein the jaw includes a sensor for sensing that an item is within the jaw.